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# WASHINGTON UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

## Governance Handbook

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### Board of Trustees

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### Unity of Purpose, Roles and Responsibilities, Norms, Agreements

This handbook reflects the governance team's work on creation of a framework for effective governance. This involves ongoing discussions about unity of purpose, roles, norms, and coming to agreement on protocols for formal structures that enable the governance team to continue to perform its responsibilities in a way that best reflects all children.

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# Building a Governance Team

## Unity of Purpose

*Unity of Purpose is a common focus, super-ordinate goals, and the core values and beliefs governance team members share in common about children, the district and public education. Unity of Purpose helps them transcend their differences to fulfill a greater purpose.*

What do we, as a governance team, want to accomplish?

What do we stand for?

- We want to be a team with a common focused direction so we are not a distraction to the district or community but a catalyst for the focused efforts of the employees, and the community can see evidence of this focused direction.
- Our shared purpose is to have the best learning environment for all students.
- We want to be partners with the staff in positive change.
- We want to maintain trust and continue to move the district forward.
- We want to maintain our effectiveness as a governance team.
- We want to understand our individual jobs and collective responsibilities.
- We want to oversee the putting together of a first-rate program and first-rate facilities, making sure we continue to improve – never resting on our laurels.
- We want to perpetuate a legacy of positive culture as people come and go.

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# Roles and Responsibilities

*Mutual agreement on the roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent.*

The role of trustees is to stay focused on the big picture while fulfilling five responsibilities in a series of job areas. These five responsibilities are:

1. We set direction.
2. We ensure accountability.
3. We establish the structure.
4. We provide support.
5. We act as community leaders.

We carry out these responsibilities in each of the following job areas:

- Setting the District's direction
- Student learning and achievement
- Finance and Facilities
- Human Resources
- Policy
- Judicial Review
- Collective Bargaining
- Community Relations and Advocacy

The superintendent assists the board in carrying out its responsibilities in each of the job areas, and leads the staff toward the accomplishment of the agreed upon district vision and goals.

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# Creating and Sustaining a Positive Governance Team Culture

*Culture is the positive or negative atmosphere created by the way people in an organization treat each other. Teams have unwritten (implicit) or written (explicit) agreements about how they will behave with each other and others. These behavioral ground rules, often called norms, enable teams to build and maintain a positive culture or shift a negative one.*

## Governance Norms

In addition to meeting the norms below in order to create a positive culture and atmosphere, we agree to act in ways that will help us meet the CSBA professional Governance Standards.

We agree to:

- No surprises – let people know of questions or concerns ahead of time.
- Respect one another: be prompt, listen, and follow through on agreements.
- Use attentive listening. One person speaks at a time.
- Respect differences and value each person's contributions.
- Remember the importance of hearing from each member.
- Be professional when we do not agree.
- Promote a transparent and public process. Explain the basis of decisions.
- Use meeting time wisely.

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And above all:

- Focus on students' best interests – on what's best for the students!  
This is what we do! And it's the touchstone that allows us to have our differences.

## Protocols – Establishing Formal Structures and Processes

*Effective governance teams discuss and agree on the formal structures and processes used by the board and superintendent in their functioning as a team (e.g., processes or structures for agenda setting, set-up of board room and table, agenda structure, handling complaints or concerns from the community, bringing up a new idea); how governance teams operate, how they do business. These formal agreements about how groups will operate are often called protocols.*

### Issue

### Our governance team's agreement on how we will handle this

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| ✓ Self-monitoring of governance team effectiveness | ✓ We will schedule workshops annually to review governance team agreements and processes  |
| ✓ Voting No  | ✓ Each trustee respects the right of other trustees to vote "no" on an issue. But everyone agrees it is a courtesy to the team to explain the reasons for the "no" vote either during deliberations or before casting the vote. |
| ✓ Visiting schools                                 | ✓ Visits are encouraged. As a professional courtesy, trustees will  |

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call the principal ahead of time to arrange the visit. Trustees will also be cautious about encroaching on the learning environment. To assist in this matter, the superintendent will ensure principals and teachers know that a teacher does not need to interrupt his or her lesson when a board member visits a classroom.

## Issue

## Our governance team's agreement on how we will handle this

- ✓ Handling concerns from the public and staff

- ✓ When someone complains to us, we will listen carefully, remembering we are only hearing one side of the story, and then we will direct that person to the person in the district most appropriate and able to help them resolve their concern. We will make sure they understand the appropriate order of who to contact (teacher, then principal, then superintendent) and are aware of any formal forms or policies that might assist them (e.g., written complaint form). This will ensure everyone is treated fairly, equally and expeditiously and that the process and procedures of the district are upheld. It will also clarify that one board member has no authority to fix a problem. As a representative of the public, it is important that the board member invite the person with the complaint to ultimately get back to him/her if the issue is not resolved.

- ✓ Individual board member requests for information

- ✓ When an individual board member requests information, it will be provided to all board members. An individual board member will – in so far as possible – work to let the superintendent and staff know ahead of time when a request for information will be made in public so the staff can be prepared to provide an answer. Individual board members will self-monitor to ensure one person’s request for information does not divert an inappropriate amount of time from staff efforts to achieve district goals.

Issue

Our governance team’s agreement on how we will handle this

- ✓ Individual board member requests for action

- ✓ The only authority to direct actions rests with the full board sitting at the board table. A majority vote sets such direction. Individuals can request action by bringing up a new idea, explaining their interest in a particular course of action and working to get a board majority to support moving in that direction. When a majority of the board, sitting in a formal meeting, requests action, it should be done in the context of the intended results, not the methods used to achieve those results.

- ✓ Board meeting management

- ✓ We understand that board meetings are meetings of the board held in public, not open forum town hall meetings. We will keep this in

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mind as we conduct our meetings, allowing the public to provide input at the time allotted to ensure that multiple voices of the community inform board deliberations.

However, when the board deliberates, it will be a time for the board to listen and learn from each other, taking the public input into consideration, not a time to re-engage with the public. We will consistently abide by our formal processes relating to this issue so that all persons are treated fairly and equally. We will review our policies, bylaws and protocols relating to board meeting management (e.g., time limits on input from members of the public), revisiting or reaffirming them as appropriate.





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